

A

REVIEW

OF THE

STATE

OF THE

ENGLISH NATION.

Thursday, August 8. 1706.

IN searching for Lunatics, there happens some Occasion to go as far as *Oxford*, to enquire among those Gentlemen, of whom perhaps it may be said, that too much Party Learning has made them mad.

The Happiness of this Nation consisting so much in Peace and a Concord of Affection, what Pity 'tis, it should meet with any Interruption, where the Foundation of our Happiness ought to begin.

That our two great and famous Universities are allow'd to be exemplar in their Learning, Antiquities, Libraries and Rarities, and remarkable for the Number and Capacities of the Men of Letters now among them, I readily allow; what pity it is then, that they should not equally flourish in Vertue, and how mad must they

be, that would sacrifice the Reputation of their whole Body to the Pleasure and Follies of an Interlude!

The Matter in short is, that as I am inform'd, a Set of our Players of both Companies——Than whom I need not describe greater Patterns of Vice, and among them, several who now stand Indicted for Blasphemy and Prophaneness, are now gone down to the University of *Oxford* to assist in the accomplishing, *Anglicè*, debauching the Morals of the Sons of our chief Families, and the young Generation of the Nation's Instructors.

Blush, ye Governors of Houses, Heads of Colleges, and ruling Members of the University, when you shall read over your own Rules and Regulations for the Government of the general Body in that place, and at the same

time are guilty, at least of permitting those Engines of the Devil who prompt the Vanity of our Youth, to be set openly to work before your Faces in your Jurisdiction.

Nor can it be said, this is not a just Charge on the University, *as a Body*; since 'tis plain, no Play can be acted in the City of *Oxford* without License first obtain'd from the University.

How then can the Work of Reformation of Manners go on in *England*, when the Youth of our Clergy shall have their Minds early made familiar with the Prophaneness and Immoralities constantly acted upon the Stage, and introduc'd under the Authority of the University.

Nor is it to be conceal'd, that this Authority has openly appear'd in protesting and encouraging the Players, the Beadles and Officers of the University appearing at the Play-House Doors to keep good Orders, and prevent the common People, *too justly incens'd* at the Liberty and scandalous Crimes of the Play-house, from ill treating the Players.

For God's sake, Gentlemen, look back upon the Gift of your pious Founders, who built, and so plentifully endow'd the several Colleges and Houses that form your University. How do the Preambles of their Gifts frequently introduce the Bounty with these Words, "For the Honour of God, Encouragement of Learning, the Increase of " Virtue, Piety, and true Religion, I give " and grant, &c. — Pray, Gentlemen, which of all these Ends of the Founders do these Comedians answer? What Additions do these Gentlemen Actors make to Virtue and true Religion — What Helps to Piety, what design to honour God, in this new Addition to study?

I doubt not those Gentlemen that charge me with falling upon the *Church*, will cease their Clamours at this particular. I hope, the Players are not gone down at the Request of the *Church*; if they are, no Man need say any thing more to the *Church's* Disadvantage; if it be a Dishonour to the *Church* to admit publickly of all the Helps to her own Destruction; if it be a Reproach to her to see some of her Reverend Clergy

preaching against Plays, and others crowd the Boxes of the Theatre — With what Face can an English-Clergy-man suffer the Habit and Vestments of a Christian Priest, which distinguish him for a Person set apart for the Service of God, to be seen in the lewd Crowd of the Admirers of Vice — How can ye, Gentlemen of the Gown, preach against Vice, cry down the Immoralities of the Age, and struggle with the Torrent of the Nation's Crimes? How can you bear Testimony for God, and vindicate the *Church* as the Bulwark of the Christian Religion, while you are seen every day encouraging the Interludes and vile Representations of the corrupted Stage?

How can you bear, without Indignation, to sit and hear the intolerable Scoffs at Religion, the Banters at your Profession, the infamous Ridicule put there upon your Function?

How often do you see the Parson made the Buffoon of the Play, his meer Office hiss'd off the Stage, Religion it self made the Jest of the Day, and all the Masks of Vice put upon Virtue — With what Patience can you bear to see Modesty toss'd in a Blanket, Nature it self worried to Death, Magistracy hiss'd out of the World, Lewdness and Looseness adorning the Heroe, Virtue and Manners cloth'd with Contempt? How can you be silent, while all Manner of Morality, whether of the Tongue or the Gesture, is made the Sport of the Time; your Persons exposed, your Constitution banter'd, Religion made a Jest, and your Maker insulted; some of the worst of which is to be seen in the *Spanish* Fryar, Recruiting Officer, and other Plays acted already among you?

Nor is it unworthy your Consideration, how low these things make you in the Esteem of wise and vertuous Men; You, whose Tongues are tip'd with Eloquence, and whose shining Parts adorn the *Church*, unless your shining Conversation also adorns the great Calling you are plac'd in; With what Awe and Reverence to your Doctrine, with what Respect to your Persons, with what Attention to the Oracles of your Mouth, can you expect your Auditory should attend your Ministry?

How

How can the loose Strumpet tremble at the Judgment of God, denounc'd against her Sins by the Reverend Tongue of her Minister; when she but yesterday saw the same serious awful Countenance, that now reproves her, deform'd with the Smiles of Pleasure at the vicious Banter of a lewd Representation in a bawdy Play? How shall that Hand, extended in laying forth her Crimes, carry any Awe with it, which the Day before was lifted up to clap and applaud the vile Performance of those Sons of Hell, the Stage-Players?

Pardon me, Gentlemen of Oxford, if I say, you cannot but lessen the Esteem the World has of your Vertue, what ever it does of your Learning, while you invite down such People for your Diversion! How can you be diverted with Men, whose Morals are scandalous to the Nation, whose Persons stand now Indicted for Blasphemy and Bawdy, whose Trade it is to laugh at Religion, mock their Maker, and banter the Nation's Vertue?

I'll readily allow you the Lawfulness of Representations, and that Plays abstracted from the Leudness and Vice of their Practice, may in themselves be innocent—— But, Gentlemen, pray be mov'd by an earnest Solicitor for the Reputation of *English* Vertue, to consider two things.

1. Circumstances differ, and most Evils are so circumstantially rather than naturally. You have plac'd your selves in a Sphere of Opposition to Vice; you that are the Instructors of Youth, the Polishers and Refiners of Manners; you that are forming the Genius of those, that are to be the Instructors of our Posterity; you that have the Charge of the *Church's* Defenders, to whose Care the Sons of the Prophets are committed, and by whose Example the Conversation of those will be regulated, whose Office will be to regulate others; you that are Lights set on high Places, and of whom every Step taken, is one way or other exemplar; to you those Liberties are not lawful, that Men in other Capacities might take without Sin.

What an eternal Reproach must it be to the *English* Nation, to see the Vice-Chancellor of an University, the Heads of Hou-

ses, the Fellows and Graduates going in their Formalities to the Theatre, adjourning from their Prayers to the Play, and sometimes adjourning their Prayers for the Play; to see Authority stoop to that Vice it ought to trample on? How grievous is it, and how must it wound the Thoughts of those pious Parents, whose Children are committed to the Tutelage and Government of your several Colleges, to see their Governours lead them to that Place, which they ought to punish them for approaching?

Pray, Gentlemen, reflect upon the Care of Youth under your Hands, and what sober Parents will ever commit their Sons to your Charge?

I beseech you to reflect upon the Scandal to your general Character with all the Men of Vertue and Learning abroad; and how it will make you the Grief and Affliction of all the Protestant Churches in *Europe*, the Scoff and Derision of the *Papists*, and the Jest of Atheists, and Men of Vice; who always add the Devil, first to extenuate, and then accuse.

2. If I should allow the Plays to be lawful in themselves, and that abstracted from the vicious Representations, they are innocent Diversions, it would still remain for me to ask, Gentlemen, Where's the Play——When was it acted——And if such a Play was acted, who would come to see it; you are too good Judges of the Taste of the Times, not to know it would be hiss'd off the Stage; the Beaus would damn it for a dull thing, and the Ladies look uneasy at being disappointed of an occasion to blush——In short, the Players know better than to act dull Sobriety on the Stage; abstract the leud and the profane, there's not a Play now will bear acting, and if you should tie them down to do so, they must break and be undone.

On the other hand, you Gentlemen of Oxford, need neither Plays nor Actors; you have Men of Wit to compose, Men of Humour to present, and the Acts and Exercises of your own Houses are superiour Diversions in the Opinion of Men of Learning, if they are but Men of Vertue too, and much more advantageous to the Hearers.